

## The Corpus of the Continent: Embodiments of Australia in World Literature

VILASHINI COOPPAN  
University of California at Santa Cruz

In Patrick White's magisterial 1957 novel of the early nineteenth-century Australian landscape and dreamscape, *Voss*, the eponymous protagonist, a German who has come to Sydney to lead an expedition into the red center, is asked by his patron Mr Bonner whether he has 'studied the map.' 'Here, indeed, was a map of a kind, presumptuous where it was not a blank. "The map?" said Voss. It was certainly a vast dream from which he had wakened. Even the draper suspected its immensity as he prodded at the coast with his ivory pointer. "The map?" repeated the German. "I will first make it"' (17). *Blank. Vast. Immensity*. Can one conjure a continent without these Conradian words, or the map-making they compel? As Robert Dixon notes, the history of inland discovery in Australia brings together 'the "connected" and unified nature of both the continent as a geographical entity and the nation as a social polity' (Dixon 164).<sup>1</sup> Just as the continent's openness asks to be measured, gridded, fenced, so too is its temporal expanse corralled into the neatness of forward-moving lines. Thus land, literature, and the nation-to-be are all subsumed into the inevitable plot of progress (that Conradian synonym for empire itself). What would it mean to decolonise the continent? To provincialise it, to see it from somewhere other than the center and the end that is national literature, in short to see the continent, *this* continent, from the perspective of worlds within?

My question is another variation on the work of White's *Voss*, who announces 'I will cross the continent from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart' (27). The capable Mrs Bonner, the good draper's wife, knows better, observing 'he is already lost . . . he is simply lost. His eyes . . . cannot find their way' (21). *Voss* tells the story of its protagonist's journey out and his voyage in: *into* his love for the regal, intelligent, fiery Laura who waits for him in her uncle's Sydney home, *into* Laura's imagined, projected, invented love for Voss transmitted by letters that lose their way; and finally, *into* the love that is the true romance of the novel—the distinctive Australian love for the continent. As a figure for discovery, in White's novel as in the long history of imagining *terra australis*, the continent is where knowing and imagining, pinpointing and displacing, wanting and losing, converge. Taking Mrs Bonner to heart, I want to explore both knowing the continent and seeing the continent, and I want to do both from the heart. The rhythms of this essay are heartsongs; memories, losses, nostalgias, but also explorations, encounters, new knowings. Speeding up, slowing down, going deep, reaching out, holding fast, letting go. The work of knowing with the heart is also, it turns out, the work of thinking at the world-scale. Both these knowings demand an oscillation of place, a sense of what it means to be simultaneously *there* and *here*, an almost visceral sensation of the macro scale lying explosively latent in a micro instant, not just the continent but indeed the world in your heart. This is not thinking from above, in the style of critical mastery interrogated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and ultimately dismissed as world literature's 'cartographic arrogance' but rather thinking from all over the map, zooming out, coming close, scaling down to the self, scaling up to the work.<sup>2</sup> There is much of childhood (that original and indelible world within) in

this essay. On the one hand, this is a chosen risk, a query about what happens when one writes from the heart. On the other hand, it is no choice at all, for I cannot think Australia without thinking myself in it. What do my early childhood dreamscape and my adult critical landscape have in common? Australia itself, that place at once contained by and in excess of terminology—nation, continent, land, island. How is Australia thought, felt, mapped, described, inhabited, dreamed? And how in this rich discursive field does land operate not only as the ineradicable protagonist of Australian writing but also, in a less subject-centered fashion, as its *force*, a pulsing energy only partially captured in representation, indelibly present in the sheer thingness of place, undeniably sensed in the landscapes of the self but just as intractably sounding through the space-time of alternative cosmogonies and cartographies? In this essay I start with myself, engage the affect theory and postcolonial theory that are my current interlocutors, hazard a too impressionistic engagement with Australian literature, and merely acknowledge a too uninformed debt to Indigenous knowledges of place and identity. This is an experiment, theory not in the mode of analysis but in the style of the dream itself, an assemblage of signs and symbols, affects and remembrances, anticipations and wishes, not least among the latter a desire for a world literature that might know without mastering, know with its heart.



**Fig 1. Sydney Customs House, 2011.**



**Fig. 2. Customs House frieze.**



**Fig. 3. Taronga Park, 1969.**

I begin with twinned images of the heart of the continent: *my* Australia, let us say, and *our* Australia. I, like Voss, have been a traveler in Australia. Wearing a pair of red boots in honor of my father, who bought me a pair of the same in Sydney in 1970, I stand beneath the Sydney Customs House's frieze of the lands of the Commonwealth: Great Britain, South Africa, India, Canada, West Indies, and Polynesia (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). The second, third, and fourth of these I have in some way called home. Here I am in my first Australian inhabitation, a tourist shot from the early days of my parents' migration from apartheid-era South Africa to settle in a brick house near the railway tracks in the white, working class suburb of Eastwood (Fig. 3). My father worked long hours as a medical resident, my mother mourned the loss of the vast, tight-knit family of her first 22 years, and I, I learned things.





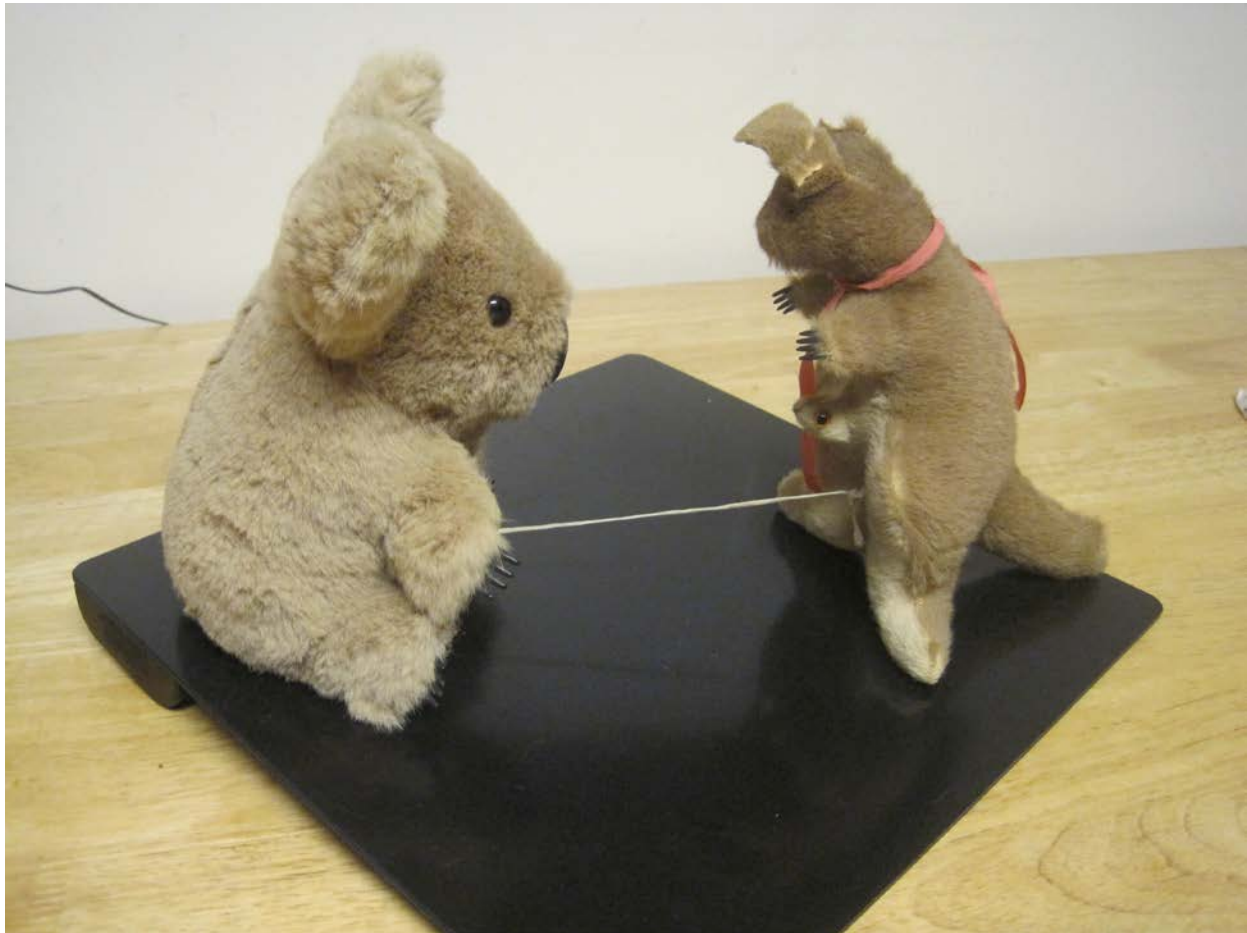
**Fig. 4. School uniform, 1971.**

My sentimental continental education: the crawling finger words of Incey Wincey Spider, *Blinky Bill* at home and the *Just So Stories* in preschool, my make-believe games of doctor in the garden and air hostess on the verandah, my slow and steady courtship of the ponderous iguana who lived at the base of the garden. The affects in objects are also a part of this story. Objects sediment histories and in their circulation allow multiple histories to condense, multiple times and spaces to converge. When I asked my father to find and photograph these objects it was easy (Fig. 4, Fig. 5). In the immigrant archive of my parents' home nothing is ever thrown away. But changes, however, happen.



**Fig. 5. My school satchel, 2014.**

My favorite childhood toy, a mother and baby koala, linked by a string that you pulled apart so you could watch them inch back together, as ‘Waltzing Matilda’ played from the depths of the mother’s belly (Fig. 6). When I opened this photo I called my father to say, it’s not right, it was a baby koala not a kangaroo. He had misremembered, the umbilical cord (theirs? ours?) having been long ago cut. And he had found a nearby kangaroo and thought it was the pair. Remembrance and betrayal in a single second; love and substitution; the mismatch of memory that is also the meeting, the tectonic collision, of ourselves with others.



**Fig. 6. Childhood toy.**

My sentimental continental education; Australia, so lush around its edges, so arid at its heart, was for my childhood self a place of utter seepage. Travels to the sun and the snow and the so white country. In Australia things leaked into me: my mother’s depression at finding herself, still yet a child, halfway across the world and far from her father’s dotting eye, with a little girl of her own with eyes only for *her* father; and my father’s volatile rage at finding himself so far from apartheid South Africa and yet still within its clutches, as the white patients refused his touch and the matey supervising residents passed him over and the money was too scarce and the continent too ungraspable. Continental education, continental deprivation, but also, the surprising shock of continental intimacy: the unforeseen tectonic coming together of persons and places that belong elsewhere.



**Fig. 7. Coolamon.**

The *coolamon*, an Aboriginal cradle hollowed from eucalyptus wood, is termite eaten now, high on a shelf in my parents' garage, but it made the trek from Australia to Canada to the United States (Fig. 7). It was given to my parents, that they might place their next baby in it, by a couple they met by chance while walking on a Queensland beach. Two Indians approached us, Ayesha and Muhammad of all names. Wife of the Prophet and the Prophet, the Qur'an in Cairns, five Indians on white Australia white sand, the gifting of an Aboriginal cradle, and the closing of the distance that would have kept Muslim Indians and Hindu Indians worlds apart in South Africa (or on the subcontinent). Against the seepage and the loss of continental deprivation, here was an instance of connection, conjuncture, a micro-world hollowed out from the larger world of migrant movement, national identity, and endemic racism. Lisa Lowe's term for this phenomenon is irresistible: *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Exploring the connections between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas in the period following the Haitian revolution through the histories of slavery, abolition, indenture, mercantile capitalism, and neoliberal globalisation, Lowe's vast project unfolds at the microscopic level of *intimacies*, less the visceral shock proposed by affect theory than a condition of 'spatial proximity or adjacent connection.' For Lowe, such convergences speak to the long circulation of human beings through the global labor system, the large scale processes of contact and creolisation that brought slaves, indentured laborers, and mixed-blood free peoples together, and the the micro-concentration of connection in the zone of the domestic, the familial, and the quotidian (Lowe 193). It is this macro-micro intercalation, this historical-affective relay, this tectonics of movement and memory, that I think of when I contemplate knowing the (Australian) continent with my heart. Continents, as Voss and so many other colonial explorers knew, are spatially vast and temporally deep, projected expanses that constantly rub up against microscopic intimacies. In my own heart-mapping of the continent I remember the sight of the Great Barrier Reef through a glass bottomed boat, light piercing the blue all the way down to reveal infinities, and that same briny big condensed onto the surface of the single, the only oyster my mother ever ate, on the pier by the boat, shrieking as it slid down her throat. What sort of map is this, that shifts gears and scales, that expands and contracts, that pulses with the remembrance of things past? It is melancholic and mobile,

affective and figural, visceral and historical. It is a map repetitively, even compulsively, invoked in Australian literature.

Think for example of the distant, dusty locale of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, a loose assemblage of farms and huts where 'the nearest named place, Bowen, was twelve miles off, but the twelve miles meant that they were only lightly connected to it, and even more lightly to what it was connected to: the figure in an official uniform who had given it his name and the Crown he represented, which held them all, a whole continent, in its grip' (Malouf 5). Ellen McIvor, mother of the household that takes in Gemmy Fairley, the white man who was adopted into an Aboriginal clan when still a child, has her own version of this colonial plot. Rising one night, awoken by Gemmy's nightmare cries, she feels her way in the dark to the water urn, ten paces away. 'It was like crossing a continent, step by step, with the darkness infinitely expanding ahead and no visible marker on either side' (79). Whether at the scale of the colony and metropole or that of a hut in the colony's utmost periphery, macro or micro, geopolitical or domestic, the affect of *dispossession* haunts Malouf's novel. Speculating on Gemmy's whiteness, a category untethered from English words (of which he has few) and norms (of which he has even fewer), the locals wonder 'could you lose it? Not just language, but *it*. It' (40). Echoing what Ghassan Hage calls the colonial paranoia sparked by 'the awareness of a constantly present and sometimes mystically undefined "undomesticable remainder,"' the settler colonials of *Remembering Babylon* construct Australia as a distinct entity from the continent itself: a thing at once firm and tenuous, tethered to Crown and realisable in name, but *as* name in this novel of linguistic disconnection, endlessly subject to being lost, to losing itself, to losing its claim (Hage 421). Malouf's map of Australia, like Voss's, thus handily hollows out, even as it reenacts, long centuries of colonial mapping, with its incessant measuring, gridding, naming, describing, fantasising, and projecting.

The Australia of colonial myth and legend is a eu-topia or non-place, imagined before it was discovered, mapped in the mind long before its circumference was charted by boat and its red center penetrated by foot and hoof. As Christian Grataloup documents in *L'invention des continents*, the Australian continent was long imagined as a place apart and unknown: first Ptolemy's *terra incognita* at the southernmost point of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, then medieval mapmakers' heretical Antipodes. Belief in the Antipodes, both the continent and the race that inhabited it, was understood to assert the presence of something unpredicted by the Gospel, which assigned a continent to each of Noah's three sons: Asia for Sem, Europe for Japhet, Africa for Cham. Medieval maps indeed often appeared in the tripartite form of an O internally divided by a T, demarcating three continents. While absent from many medieval maps of the world, the fourth austral continent did appear in some later ones, for example, one engraved by Franz Hogenberg in 1584 and included in the first atlas, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Ortelius.<sup>3</sup> The continent here is a looming, leaching, larger-than-life land mass that spans the bottom third of the globe, apparently combining the northern coastline of Australia and the spread of Antarctica. In the much earlier *Osma Beatus* of 1086, by contrast, the world appears as an oval split at the equator and subdivided into three zones, with the fourth zone of the antipodes marked with a citation to Isidore of Seville, who dismissed the existence of a habitable southern continent. The major image of the austral continent in the Beatus map is a skiapod, a medieval monster shielding himself from the southern sun with a single, preternaturally large foot (Eisler 9).<sup>4</sup> The antipodean foot was indeed a constant of early medieval maps, as William Eisler documents, the sign of a part of the world inhabited by another race of men.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the foot



grows backwards, sometimes it is overgrown. Later, Othello beguiles Desdemona with tales of a place inhabited by ‘men whose heads grow beneath their feet.’ Displacement and disavowal, then, are the order of the austral map, a map that confirms disbelief in the southern continent even as it directs the gaze toward it and its proxy substitute (the Antipodean foot). Call it a species of continental fetishism.

If I have been speaking of a particular continent, *terra australis*, end of the earth, bottom of the world, still unverbalsed haunt of my own infant history, I am also speaking of the continent as a particular unit for comparative and world literary studies: the continent as both like and unlike nation, region, area, globe, planet, the continent as something that shapes a particular project and method of comparison. In Franco Moretti’s pivotal work, world literature evolved as mapmaking, tracking the representation of national-domestic and global-capitalist space in the rise and spread of the novel. For Spivak, however, cartographic criticism smacks too heavily of the critic him or herself, that *sujet-supposé-a-savoir* from whose established centrality the map is understood to radiate. Could we alternatively imagine cartographic criticism at the scale of the continent? Put differently, what happens if world literature scholars, both for and against, stop conceiving of criticism (like discovery) as the practice of *making the map* and instead imagine criticism as already *on the map*, already working like a map, *in the map*, particularly a map of the sort I have previously invoked. This is a map constituted by movements and memories, a map of flows, connectivities, disjunctures, coming close and zooming out, an animated map. There’s more than one way to skin a map. By skinning, I mean fleshifying, taking flesh as a tactile figure for the affective sensorium that pulses through a map and offers another map of reading. Such a map is *chronotopical*, to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for a spatiotemporal unit(y) in which ‘time thickens out, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible, likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history’ (Bakhtin 84).

The East Asian historian Harry Harootunian, in his valuable essay ‘Comparability and the Space-Time Problem,’ pinpoints a steady shift away from time and toward what he calls ‘the fetishization of place.’ ‘Enlarged singular spatial categories,’ as Harootunian designates empires, areas, cores, peripheries, and globes, function largely as, in his words, ‘nonspace,’ ‘space without duration’ (Harootunian 29, 34). To restore time to space is Harootunian’s project. And not just any time but ‘the temporalities that must have attended the formation of the place and accompanied processes identified with it’ (29).

With the spatial turn and the resituating of its leading categories, such as culture, civilization, modernity itself, center and periphery, global and empire, which bring with them fixity, positionality, location, and asynchrony, the spatiotemporal relationship seems to have disappeared under the weight of these virtual continents . . . What once was seen as a division of continents lying at great distances from each other has now been overcome: socially produced distances such as state borders or cultural barriers appear as secondary effects of speed . . . Reinhard Koselleck, quoting from J.G. Herder’s *Metakritik* of Kant, reminds us that ‘in actuality, every changing thing has the measure of its own time within itself. No two worldly things have the same measure of time . . . There are, therefore . . . at any one time in the universe innumerable many times.’ (23–25)



Harootunian's project entails a loosening of the grip of modernity on the categories of space, and the yoking of space to time throughout the fabric of area periodisations. Harootunian turns to literary theory for one model, citing Bakhtin's chronotope, that union of a specific space and a time in a specific instant and generic form (epic, novel, realism, folklore), as an example of spatio-temporal localisation (in contrast to the more globalising analysis associated with Moretti's world maps of novelistic domination) (43). I will myself turn to the question of genre, specifically of epic form, as it expresses the chronotope of the continent. But first there is something to say about continents themselves; not the 'virtual continents' of the spatial categories that Harootunian understands to have disappeared temporal thinking but continents as worldly things, things to world with, continents with 'the measure of [their] own time within [themselves].'

Continents are bigger, older, and deeper than human scales of time. Time on the continental clock proceeds in strata and sediment, buried in the frozen remainders and reminders of what has been. There is a different kind of a pathos to continents: the fall from unity into difference, the original Pangea to the subterranean explosions that splintered it, the slow drift, the ancient settlements, the land bridges across which humans and their cultures moved outward from their African cradle, Babel at the level of the land. This continental *longue durée* is unreadable in the maps of discovery, which have no legend for this scale of time. In those maps, beginning with the chart of Willem Jansz's voyage on the Dutch ship *Duyfken*, which landed at Cape York on the New Guinea Coast in March 1606, *terra australis* appears as a provisional contour, an outline awaiting its filling in, like the map of Africa that Conrad's Marlow sees as a boy. As Paul Carter notes, the ideal space of geography is 'the blank page of the chart, empty and ready for inscription' (Carter 22–23). Entering space so as to annihilate its prehistory, colonial explorers embarked upon a 'linearization of the landscape [that] had the object of discovering a decisive direction, a horizon point toward which the landscape features seemed oriented or likely to converge' (33). And yet, 'the prehistory, of the experience that formed the survey was not a ruled line; it was more like the process of osmosis, a capillary action throughout a zone of possible connections.'

The history of these maps and the larger colonial project for which they are a figure are well known to Australian audiences and has been extensively documented. Indigenous maps of the land also belong in this story, with their circle-path iconography of dots, lines, and curves testifying to tracks in the land itself, the presence of spirit ancestors and Dreamtime happenings, and a sense of the indivisibility of time as it is experienced in space. The Dreaming, explains W.E.H. Stanner, 'is part of a moving system, accompanying it like a shadow, in continuous correspondence with it, being modified as life modifies' (Stanner 678). Narrated through stories about beings who travel the land and end up being part of it, as topographical entities who serve as metonyms for the stories, the Dreaming plumbs a continental archive, words written on/as the land.

I conjure these various maps into presence here in order to suggest that a continent is not coextensive with an era but rather contains multiple eras within it. Continents furthermore are networked places, not merely defined by their outer contours but crisscrossed, crosshatched, and above all *connected* by internal spatiotemporal lines and layers. At the scale of the continent, past meets present, Indigenous meets colonial, space meets time. Continents, as Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen argue, are myths, ways of conceptualising space and time that are rooted in a particular Enlightenment geographical and geopolitical imagination and that furthermore turn on

the diagnosis of spatialised, temporalised, and hierarchised difference: Africa and Africans, Europe and Europeans, East and West, First, Second, and Third Worlds, all categories belied by the realities of postcolonial migration. Continents, according to Lewis and Wigen, are a 'metastructure,' a 'totalizing spatial framework . . . that strives to impose its own rigid order' and whose 'standardized shapes' cannot accommodate 'the complexities that make real places interesting' (Lewis and Wigen 11). If continents are metastructures and myths, they are also metaphors. In the case of my argument, continents are metaphors for a particular kind of critical thinking whose major intervention is to privilege *connection*: spatiotemporal layerings, palimpsestic sedimentations, crisscrossing pathways.

As units of analysis, continents furthermore resist the fetishisation of period that Eric Hayot cautions against in his how-to essay for a new world literature, 'Against Periodization: or, On Institutional Time.' Given the tendency to take periods as the necessary divisions in literary scholarship, and given the attendant institutionalisation of period-based expertise as the measure of mastery at all levels of scholarship, Hayot challenges us to institutionalise 'a variety of competing concepts, including transperiodizing ones, for the study of literary history' (742). I am suggesting the continent as just such a transperiodising category. But that's not to say the continent is immune from fetishism. Continental fetishism is easy and fun: swagmen, Drogheda, *On the Beach*, vegemite, *Walkabout*, good on ya' mate, Crocodile Dundee, Big Ass Objects (Figs. 8, 9).



**Fig. 8. My mother and I, Queensland, 1972.**



**Fig. 9. Me, Queensland 2011.**

But as with the Freudian fetish, something lies beneath the surface, namely, an implicit temporal recession, an origin story, a sense of time past condensed into the fetish presence which functions, as Freud says, like a memorial to what has been and has not stopped being. Thinking at the scale of the continent, this is history, what might be called continental *durée* or the multiple processes and presences, arrivals and the absences that make the place, the layered and sedimented intercalation of geological, evolutionary, human, animal, material times. Continental fetishism veils continental *durée*, the long, nonanthropocentric, non-national, pre-imperial history of place. Continental fetishism also figures the game of staging loss so as to redress it. This is the game described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which the infant child manages his mother's departure and return through the surrogate of a spool and a string, tossed out of the crib (*fort*, gone) and reeled back in (*da*, here). And in its kitsch equivalent, the mother and baby koala, drawn apart and brought back together by a string, against the backdrop of the national anthem. Is this not a metaphor, as good as any, for the practice of continental fetishism? If this practice, like the fetish, points back to originary moments, it equally attempts to find compensations for the losses attendant in those moments. National apologies, Sorry Day, and the various other modes in which the peculiar sin of the continent (Aboriginal dispossession) is absorbed into, so as to be exorcised from, the contemporary nation-state.<sup>6</sup> Melancholia and mourning enter here, as the past is both swallowed, ingested, made one with the nation and moved on from, left behind, bypassed.

The Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot invites us to think about historical apologies as speech acts that ‘mark a temporal transition,’ contrasting wrong done in the past with a future shaped by a new relation of recognition between perpetrator and victim. If apology, in Trouillot’s words, ‘creates a new era,’ it does so, he warns, only by recreating the subject of that era in a singular guise (Trouillot 458). The ‘pastness’ to which apologies gesture, a past in which wrongs happened, is a pastness produced by the yoking of a certain kind of subject, that of liberal individualism, to a certain kind of history, one in which collectivities (nations, ethnic groups, minorities) are understood to function as subjects, bearing in Trouillot’s words ‘mood, memory, moral responsibility and feelings, down to the possibility of repentance’ (460). The problem with the subject of liberal individualism is that it emerges, like Athena, fully-formed, a singular actor, a self-same authority. It is a subject understood to have always been there, ‘existing prior to its environment and fully formed on its own terms’ (460). When collectivities (nations, political regimes, groups) are projected as these kinds of subjects, Trouillot reminds us, they are effectively framed outside of the history that made them. The only history that appears is ‘the history of the encounter on which the apology is premised.’ So history shrinks to conquest or discovery or dispossession, those events conjured so as to be bypassed. If this is the work of historical consciousness, it exists in the most instrumental of mourning modes, letting the past die so that the future may live. Trouillot offers a vision of such historicity: ‘the possibility of freezing chunks of an allegedly unified past, as in the storage model of memory and history . . . On the one hand, history is denied as an experience constitutive of the collectivity: no structure precedes the subject . . . On the other hand, the history that ties the initial wrong to the possibility of—or need for—an apology is brandished as the sole relevant story’ (462).

What Trouillot resists in his diagnosis of the global phenomenon of historical apology is the ways in which the generic form of the apology, with its particular temporality of the past broken off from the present and future, and its particular subject of universal liberal individualism, effectively *flattens* and *freezes* history. History is better thought as a force field, where vectors of time, space, event, action are constantly intersecting, producing at their nodal points highly specific kinds of subjects and forms of historical presence: Indigenous, colonial, postcolonial, animal, human, terraform, non-anthropocene. This kind of history is something that world literature theory has embraced as one of its predominant models. Call it history in motion; history understood not as the property of a particular subject (or nation, group, collectivity conceived as a subject) but rather history as that through which all such entities are constantly circulating. History, in other words, as a process of constant scalar movement. To summarise, then, I would like to suggest a map of world literature theory in which history *moves*, like memory, like genre, and like affect, all of which have in common a nonlinearity, a spectral presence of the past in the present, and a spatiality marked by intersection, overlay, and scalar oscillation.

World literature has often been defined as a problem of scale, whether of perspectival orientation (as in Franco Moretti’s and David Damrosch’s claiming of it as a problem, not an object, and their espousal of ‘distant’ and ‘elliptical’ reading) or of interscalar jumping, as in Wai-Chee Dimock’s model of a literary ‘deep time’ (Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 3). ‘Deep time,’ she explains, ‘thickens time, lengthens it, shadowing in its midst the abiding traces of the planet’s multitudinous life’ and emphasising ‘longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric’ (3). Such scalar politics elaborate a sense of world literature’s geographical and temporal breadth—a breadth that implodes into densities, nodal points where



the far (historically old, geographically far) and the near (the now, the here) collide to unleash new patterns of literary history and new protocols of reading.

Foremost among the usable units of world literature is genre, itself a nodal and networked category. Genre is *nodal* in its condensing capabilities, what Fredric Jameson terms genre's *sedimentation* of historicity into form (Jameson 141) and what I have called, after Jacques Derrida, genre's haunted life, that is genre's uncanny animation of the forces of its age and the prehistory of its moment.<sup>7</sup> Genre, furthermore is *networked* in its constitution through a citational, iterative, recombinant process. Genre, in other words, is not a point of origin, still less a law of reproduction, but something always running from, yet routing back through, itself. In this formal feedback loop, each successive iteration or, as Derrida says, 'contamination' of genre becomes part of the system.' As both a process of networked virtual recombination and a spectral practice of memory, genre provides a useful compass for navigating the crisscrossing linkages and uncanny reanimations that constitute world literature.

In a recent essay titled 'Recycling the Epic: *Gilgamesh* on Three Continents,' Dimock proposes epic genre as the very phenomenon of worldliness. Epic, she writes, is 'a planet-wide ecology, bringing newness into the world through the arcs of decomposing and recomposing' ('Recycling' 19). Epic's recombinant form causes it to recycle and redistribute itself across multiple times and spaces, a span whose breadth Dimock condenses through the juxtaposition of the four-thousand-year old Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a 2006 stage adaptation by the poet Yusuf Komunyakaa and the dramaturg Chad Gracia, and, very briefly, Joan London's 2001 *Gilgamesh: A Novel*. Dimock further diagnoses an oscillating *scale* in epic, with its shifts between the vast horizons of gods, humans, animals, and worlds and the microscopic intensities and pathos of what she calls epic's 'raw, visceral' emotions (rage, grief, fear) (23). Epic, she posits, is 'the genre of the living world . . . the genre that carries forward the most physically grounded emotions known to humankind, a prehistoric continuum surviving into the twenty-first century.' Epic, as Dimock says, makes us mortals, orients us, via narrative temporality and viscosity, to our own end even as it casts our gaze back to our beginnings. This oscillation between beginnings and ends, individuals and species, the life of the one and the life of the planet, are all hallmarks of what Dimock calls epic's 'scalar variations' (24). Thinking through scale highlights the dynamism inherent to genre, even as it also lets us see the spectral glow of what I have called genre's 'haunted life.' Epic in Dimock's sense of 'a prehistoric continuum' might also be said to be *afterlife* itself: not the place that follows death, the journey to which is a constant epic topos, but the ghostly terrain that is genre itself. As the comparative literature scholar Claudio Guillén claims, 'the concept of genre looks backward and forward at the same time'; backward to older works and forward to new ones in which generic codes find themselves repeated and transformed (*Literature as System*). Genre in this sense *is* memory, the housing of the long history of the species that makes fiction.

We are accustomed to understanding genre as a category through which to teleologise literary history by codifying the vagaries of literary movement (the short starts, the dead-ends) into something like literary *progress*: the rise of the novel or, indeed, its death. But genres actually operate through nonlinear processes of interaction, selection and combination, revealing the essentially recombinant structure highlighted by Dimock. In her introduction to a special 2008 PMLA issue titled *Remapping Genre*, Dimock figures genre not as a thing but a *process*, something she evocatively terms 'regenreing: or cumulative reuse, an alluvial process,

sedimentary as well as migratory' ('Introduction' 1380).<sup>8</sup> I would argue that it is genre's recombinant structure that enables its functioning as memory, both long-term memory (large-scale histories of literary form and period) and short-term memory, that fleeting condensation of a particular moment's *events*, a flashing forth in some represented form of the history behind the genre. If long-term memory constitutes literary history as cumulative, ordered, and developmental (the rise of the novel), short-term memory is disjunctive, ruptured, animated by the shock of an instant, accessed through the short-circuiting that happens when an image, a phrase, an emotion captured in generic form, registers at the level of the lived body. This corporeality is precisely what Dimock finds in epic, with its scenes of death and decay. Corporeality, viscosity, short-term memory: these are all terms central to a category I want to bring to world literature: affect. But first let me return to that evocative description of genre as 'alluvial process, sedimentary as well as migratory.'

'Sedimentary' is a term used by both Dimock and Jameson to capture genre's haunted housing of the past. Sedimentation, the crystallisation of multiple instants into a particular form, also constitutes a central aspect of what Manuel De Landa calls *nonlinear history*. De Landa's *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, with its titular nod to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, embraces the nonlinear as that which resists the analytics of sequence, stage, and telos; foregrounds interactions between parts rather than sum totals; and thus arrives at a notion of history in which each new phase, be it geological, biological, human, linguistic, cultural, agricultural, urban, 'simply added itself to the other ones, coexisting and interacting with them without leaving them in the past' (De Landa 16). De Landa's map of nonlinear history recalls the rhizomatic map of *A Thousand Plateaus*, a map with no center and no periphery, no top and no bottom, but structured instead by points of density or saturation and by lines of connection or departure, a map in motion. Here, now, is De Landa applying the rhizome to the continent:

In terms of the nonlinear dynamics of our planet, the thin rocky crust on which we live and which we call our land and home is perhaps the earth's least important component . . . If we consider that the oceanic crust on which the continents are embedded is constantly being created and destroyed (by solidification and remelting) and that even continental crust is under constant erosion so that its materials are recycled into the ocean, the rocks and mountains that define the most stable and durable traits of our reality would merely represent a local *slowing down* of this flowing reality . . . Similarly, our individual bodies and minds are mere coagulations or decelerations in the flows of biomass, genes, memes, and norms. (257–58)

Thinking at the scale of the continent, for De Landa, entails turning space inside out (subterranean movement displaces the solid crust) and turning time back on itself (the seeming present becomes the slowing down of the past rather than its acceleration or end point). De Landa's nonlinear approach to the continent specifically and to what he calls the 'stuff' of history more broadly (lavas, magmas, genes, memes) foregrounds thinking that proceeds not through lines of development but rather through the condition of temporal overlay, interlocking, and coincidence.

Such palimpsestic, sedimentary time and rhizomatic space shapes the thinking of history, the thinking of genre, and the thinking of the third category I want to bring to world literature theory:

affect. In Freud's economic analysis of psychic mechanisms, the emergence of an affect situates the subject in relation to her own history: the set of circumstances and relations that first gave rise to a particular passion and that persist in the secondary experience of it. Emily Apter's *Continental Drift* (how can I not cite it?) conjures affect as 'the residue of the real: ghostly afterimages of attitudes, performances of human-ness, and attempts to simulate being a subject' (20).<sup>9</sup> Critics of stricter Deleuzian persuasion separate affect from the subject, describing how affect flows *without* the individual, without subjectivity, and even without the body as its center, over the larger field of matter itself as what Nigel Thrift terms 'a sensed-sensing energy with multiple centers' (Thrift 18). In Brian Massumi's influential account of the 'autonomy of affect' the body registers certain stimuli and effects and in so doing 'infolds contexts [. . .] the *trace* of past actions, *including a trace of their contexts*' even as it opens to that realm of potentiality that Massumi calls the *virtual*, where 'past and future brush shoulders with no mediating present' (Massumi 30). Where Massumi understands emotions to capture affect, subjecting them to narrativizable meaning, affects themselves operate in nonlinear, nonhermeneutic, and nonsignifying ways, lingering on beyond the point of capture and opening themselves to potential deterritorializations and future freedoms. Whether or not affective life is strictly speaking *historical*, it is nonetheless cumulative, layered, sedimentary, and forward-moving (like nonlinear history).

In affect, as in nonlinear history, and as in genre, there are no clear and firm boundaries between past, present, and future. These networked categories of preserved traces and spectral presences that *remain* even as they are recombined yield a particular orientation to world literature. Kathleen Stewart in her afterword to *The Affect Theory Reader* in fact speaks of affect theory as 'critique attuned to the worlding of the refrain,' where worlding is not so much an orientation outward or backward or even forward as it is, in Stewart's words, 'a burrowing into the generativity of what takes form, what hits the senses, shimmers' (339). She writes: 'Concepts built in this way score the trajectories of a worlding's looping refrains, its potentialities, and attach themselves to the living out of what is singular and proliferative in a scene or moment, to what is accrued, sloughed off, realized, imagined, enjoyed, hated, brought to bear or just born in a compositional present.' Criticism in such a mode is a mobile practice, something that does not merely seek to link the objects of its analysis (say nations and globes, or literary pasts and futures) but rather itself, as criticism, enacts the movement it maps. It is for this reason I have channeled, far more personally than ever before, the scene of my own sentimental continental education, the affective imprint of my long-ago becoming Australian.

These intimacies suggest another way in which to read Joan London's *Gilgamesh: A Novel*. The narrative, as Dimock notes, is 'looped through the major historical events of the twentieth century—World War I, the Armenian genocide, the Soviet invasion, the outbreak of World War II—which bring a young Australian woman, Edith Clark, and her young son, Jim, first to London and then to Yerevan, Armenia, and finally through Persia and Syria before returning to Nunderup, Australia' ('Recycling' 32). And London's novel also, as Dimock points out, stages the return or what I have called the afterlife of the epic, in the form of the copy of *Gilgamesh* that Edith's cousin Leopold and his Armenian driver Aram carry everywhere and whose story the characters unwittingly reenact and recycle as they love, lose, search, grieve, die, and endure. I would like to turn world literature's attention to moments in which the patterns of intertextual haunting reveal points of affective intensity, points where distinct feelings (love, rage, fear, grief) accumulate, overlay, intersect and so yoke distinct times and places together. I am not so much

seeking to characterise the ‘feeling’ of a certain historical age as I am attempting to skin the map of world literature, bringing what Lowe helpfully calls ‘the intimacy of four continents’ or the intercalation of micro and macro histories, large-scale movements and feeling-saturated instants, to the work of criticism.

Affect, genre, memory, and history, those categories of preserved traces and spectral presences that *remain* even as they are recombined, that sediment even as they shift, are concepts that help to map world literature differently. Specifically, they bring us closer not merely to explaining but indeed to sensing the tectonic shifts of displacement that create surprising closeness between historical event-horizons distant in space and/or time. So in London’s *Gilgamesh: A Novel* the world of war-torn Europe, Asia, and Australia (the violence of three continents) finds its mirror in the primeval rage and grief and loss of the Sumerian epic’s ancient Mesopotamia, where the built walls of human cities and the infinite reaches of the heavens, the underworld, and the edge of the world all intersect. In London’s *Gilgamesh*, which I take as a model for what I have been calling continental literature, continents are nodally dense and laterally dispersed, at once saturated with their own time and place yet slipping into others. So, for example, the Armenian Aram (born in Turkey, yoked to Leopold in Iraq on an archeological dig, and now accompanying him to remote Nunderup), senses in the barren Australian land a politics behind the place, a buried history, that turns out to be that of the Armenian genocide, the traumatic tale he cannot tell but finds projected onto the brutal landscape of the bush (24, 45). And so too the Australian Edith finds that while ‘Armenia’ may be a place that other men who travel the world say ‘nobody wants to go to,’ for her ‘Armenia’ is ‘a landscape superimposed over the hills and valleys around her’ (78, 178). The sense of place here is networked, nonlinearised, suffused by the palimpsestic coexistence of two places, two times at once. The doubling of Australia and Armenia stands for a kind of connective multiplicity, a transcontinental intimacy, a state of momentary coincidence that finds its counterpart at the novel’s end, when Edith, knowing that Aram has died abroad and that Leopold may not come back, decides to return to Australia with her son Jim. She enters it, in her words, as if she too were part of ‘a wave of Displaced Persons,’ as if her story were ‘one story among hundreds of sagas reaching an end’ (191). The continent, the nation, the self, and the story of all three are in this instance unmoored, no longer singular but made multiple in the characteristic gesture of nonlinear history. Australia at the end of *Gilgamesh* is the place that Edith will fear (remembering ‘Australia was a place where they tried to take away your children’) but which she will not leave again, the place that Jim will be in but not of, as he reads adventures, histories, *Gilgamesh*, turns the globe Edith has given him, and ultimately falls into an epic depression of grief as he dreams of his father and Armenia. Mother country, father land, war, Armenian genocide, stolen generations, dispossession, and colonisation are the continental events that score the surface of novel. These continental events are also deep, dense with memory, be it the memory of the event itself or the textual memories of the generic forms through which the events have been told—epics, adventures, archaeological reports, dreams, love letters, silences, displacements, undelivered and unaccepted apologies for the betrayal of never coming back. Finally, *Gilgamesh*’s transcontinental events are dense with the modality of memory as itself a kind of networked movement, operating sometimes in the style of a *longue durée* and other times as something that rubs up against the immediacy of an event, causing one time to touch another instantaneously, in a shock of apprehension, as affect.

What’s called for in response to this skiddingly slippery yet dense terrain is a reading method whose very *categories* are networked, reaching laterally and vertically, linking and tunneling



down, each category (affect, genre, memory, history) capable of tracking, like stars across a distant sky, a set of independent movements within a larger interconnectivity. If this vision conjures the universe, it also threatens the universal: the danger of crafting a point of view from which all event horizons (war, genocide, dispossession, colonization, immigration) or indeed all literatures or all continents look the same. The view from above, as the planetary perspective is often imagined, still needs to cut its apprehension of wholeness (Planet Earth) with the localities of emplotment in particular spaces and times, and often in multiple ones simultaneously. And so it is that I am grateful for the chance to come home to *this* continent, to find myself in it but not of it, to find it in my work but in so many other ways not yet imagined in my work, and, finally, to think in ways my younger self could not have, what being Australian might teach about being in the world and *being for the world*, which is as good a description as I know for what it means to do world literature.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Robert Dixon, Brigid Rooney, and Brigitta Olubas for their generous invitation to participate in the *Worlds Within* conference, and for their illuminating and thought-provoking engagement with my work. I am grateful additionally to the attendees of the conference, from whom I learned so much about Australian literature past and present, and to the anonymous reviewers of *JASAL* whose comments helped deepen and refine this essay's argument.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See also Libby Robin. *How a Continent Created a Nation*. Sydney: U of New South Wales P, 2007; and Elizabeth McMahon. 'Australia, the Island Continent: How Contradictory Geography Shapes the National Imaginary.' *Space and Culture* 13.2 (2010): 178–87.

<sup>2</sup> See Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature.' *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 55–67; 'More Conjectures.' *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 73–81; *Distant Reading*. New York: Verso, 2013; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*. The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, mappemonde* by Abraham Ortelius (1584). Engraved by Franz Hogenberg. Rpt. in Christian Grataloup. *L'invention des continents*. Paris: Larousse, 2009, 125.

<sup>4</sup> This and other images can be found in William Eisler. *The Furthest Shore: Images of Terra Australis from the Middle Ages to Captain Cook*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995, 9. See also Richard White. *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1788–1980*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981; and, for a discussion of mapmaking and modes of knowledge, Tim Ingold. *Being Alive, Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Eisler, see Matthew Goldie. *The Idea of the Antipodes: Place, People, and Voice*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of the complex ways in which such national commemorations have been interpreted, contested, and resignified, see Patrick A. McAllister. *National Days and the Politics of Indigenous and Local Identities in Australia and New Zealand*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2012; Bain Attwood. *Telling the truth about Aboriginal history*. N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2005; I. Copley (producer). *Sorry Proof Country*. Australia: Indigenous Australian Productions: 2004; D. Foley. *Beyond Reconciliation*. [speech, 2003] at [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/staff/research-profile/Dennis\\_Foley/Publications.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/staff/research-profile/Dennis_Foley/Publications.html)

<sup>7</sup> See Vilashini Cooppan. *Worlds Within*; 'Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature.' *Comparative Literature Studies* special issue on Globalization and World Literature 41.1 (2004); 'Hauntologies of Form: Race, Writing, and the Literary World-System,' *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism*, special issue on Comparative Literature and Globalism 13.1 (2006); and 'World Literature between History and Theory' in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See Also Dimock's characterisation of genre as *virtual*, 'a runaway reproductive process: offbeat, off-center, and wildly exogenous,' and her specification that 'the key attributes of genres when they are seen as virtual are stackability, switchability, and scalability' ('Introduction' 1379). On the sentiment in epic see also Thomas Greene. 'The Natural Tears of Epic.' in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*. Eds. Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999: 189–202.

<sup>9</sup> See also the affective networks in the circuitry of territorialising regimes, deterritorialised flows, and cybernetic informatics that comprise the 'network theory' Apter thinks world literature through in the recent *Routledge Companion to World Literature*.

## WORKS CITED

- Apter, Emily. *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*. Chicago & London: U of Chicago P 1999.
- Attwood, Bain. *Telling the truth about Aboriginal history*. N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2005.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Carter, Paul. *Dark Writing: Writing Past Colonialism*. Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2008.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. 'Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature.' *Comparative Literature Studies* (special issue on Globalization and World Literature) 41.1 (2004).
- . 'Hauntologies of Form: Race, Writing, and the Literary World-System.' *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* (special issue on Comparative Literature and Globalism) 13.1 (2006).
- . 'World Literature between History and Theory.' in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Eds. Theo d'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Copley, I. (producer). *Sorry Proof Country*. Australia: Indigenous Australian Productions, 2004.
- De Landa, Manuel. *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History History*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1997.
- Dimock, Wai-Chee. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton UP, 2006.
- . 'Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge.' *Remapping Genre*. PMLA 122.5 (2007): 1377–88.
- . 'Recycling the Epic: Gilgamesh on Three Continents.' *English Language Notes* 51 (Spring/Summer 2013): 19–33.
- Dixon, Robert. "'A Nation for a Continent": Australian Literature and the Cartographic Imaginary of the Federation Era.' *Antipodes* 28.1 (June 2014): 161–73.
- Eisler, William. *The Furthest Shore: Images of Terra Australis from the Middle Ages to Captain Cook*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995).
- Foley, D. *Beyond Reconciliation* [speech, 2003] [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/staff/research-profile/Dennis\\_Foley/Publications.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/staff/research-profile/Dennis_Foley/Publications.html)
- Goldie, Matthew. *The Idea of the Antipodes: Place, People, and Voice*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Greene, Thomas. 'The Natural Tears of Epic.' in *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*. Eds. Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus and Susanne Wofford. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999: 189–202.

- Guillén, Claudio. *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971.
- Hage, Ghassan. 'Multiculturalism and White Paranoia in Australia.' *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 3.3 (September 2002): 417–37.
- Harootunian, Harry. 'Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem.' *boundary 2* 32.2 (2005): 23–46, 29.
- Hayot, Eric. 'Against Periodization: or, On Institutional Time.' *New Literary History* 42 (2011): 739–56.
- Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive, Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Grataloup, Christian. *L'invention des continents*. Paris: Larousse, 2009.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.
- Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015.
- Lewis, Martin and Karen Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.
- McAllister, Patrick A. *National Days and the Politics of Indigenous and Local Identities in Australia and New Zealand*. Durham: Carolina Academic P, 2012.
- McMahon, Elizabeth. 'Australia, the Island Continent: How Contradictory Geography Shapes the National Imaginary.' *Space and Culture* 13.2 (2010): 178–87.
- Malouf, David. *Remembering Babylon*. New York: Vintage International, 1994.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham NC: Duke UP, 2002.
- Moretti, Franco. 'Conjectures on World Literature.' *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 55–67.
- 'More Conjectures.' *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 73–81.
- *Distant Reading*. New York: Verso, 2013.
- Ortelius, Abraham. *Typus Orbis Terrarum, mappemonde* (1584). Engraved by Franz Hogenberg. Rpt. in Christian Grataloup. *L'invention des continents*. Paris: Larousse, 2009.
- Robin, Libby. *How a Continent Created a Nation*. Sydney: U of New South Wales P, 2007.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.
- Stanner, W.E.H. *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays, 1938–1979*. Canberra: Australian National UP, 1979.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 'Introduction.' *The Affect Theory Reader*. Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2010.
- Thrift, Nigel. *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 'Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era.' in *The Collective Memory Reader*. Eds. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, Levy. New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- White, Patrick. *Voss*. North Sydney: Random House, 2012.
- White, Richard. *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1788–1980*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981.